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Approved For Release 2002/05/09 : CIA-RDP84-00825R000100080004-4

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31 March 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: The DD/I-Requested Memorandum on Roads in Southern Laos

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1. Mr. Brammell requested [] (NPIC), and [] (OBI) on 30 March 1966 to discuss production of a DD/I-requested memorandum on routes in southern Laos.

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2. [] discussed: (1) a large format study which is being produced for DIA and which will show the historical development of roads in southern Laos prior to 1954 as well as road development since 1963; and (2) the draft (which he had in his possession) of a photo interpretation report (PIR) which NPIC proposes to publish periodically, possibly weekly, or as determined necessary by new Communist LOC development in southern Laos.

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3. [] emphasized that the proposed PIR would have to encompass major new tracks, i.e., routes which would allow passage of heavy-laden bikes but not jeeps. He indicated that it would also be necessary to include annotated sections of 1:250,000 maps (JOG's) so that "field" components--from Hawaii to Udorn--could post to their situation maps with accuracy.

4. Mr. Brammell stated that the DD/I had requested a brief memorandum consisting of 2 pages of text and a map showing the current status of roads in southern Laos; presumably, the readership of this memorandum would be chiefly high-level U.S. authorities.

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5. [] suggested there appeared to be two needs -- a "tactical" need which would be fulfilled by NPIC's proposed PIR and a "strategic" need which would be satisfied by the DD/I's proposed memorandum.

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6. [] proposed the Geographic Memorandum, (GM), as a suitable vehicle for the road memorandum. Tentative plans are to have 2 pages of text and a map. Consideration maybe given to using appropriate pictures from the Road Watch Teams for another page.

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7. [] will start initial work on the GM immediately, but completion will be contingent on publication (which is imminent) of the DIA-requested NPIC study mentioned in paragraph 2 above. This study will give a comprehensive depiction of the roads in southern Laos, and will, consequently, offer a definitive bases for the first GM. OBI will coordinate the GM with all pertinent units of NPIC, ORR, and DIA.

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0080004-4

COMMUNIST ROADNET IN THE LAOS PANHANDLE



See Revision dated May 1966
Copies of GM 66-4 at Records Center
to be destroyed.

CIA/BI GM 66-4
April 1966

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

WARNING

This material contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, Title 18, USC, Secs. 793 and 794, the transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

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COMMUNIST ROADNET IN THE LAOS PANHANDLE *

Communist movement of men and supplies overland from North Vietnam to combat areas in South Vietnam depends on an increasingly elaborate network of roads constructed in the panhandle of Laos. The network comprises the principal part of the so-called Ho Chi Minh trail, which bypasses the extremely mountainous terrain obstructing direct movement into South Vietnam and also provides a side door into South Vietnam, thus avoiding the Demilitarized Zone. In the past year the Communists have almost doubled the mileage of the roadnet and have successfully established a continuous north-south route that extends from the Mu Gia Pass southward about 300 miles to the vicinity of the Cambodian border. This enlarged network, over which moves a major part of the logistical needs that the Communist forces in South Vietnam obtain from external sources, is very important to Communist capabilities in South Vietnam. Currently, it assumes increased importance in connection with a possible VC-mounted offensive in the highlands of South Vietnam timed to coincide with the impending southwest monsoon, the summer rainy season.

The main access road from North Vietnam is Route 15, which enters Laos through Mu Gia Pass (see FIGURE 1). Current estimates indicate an average of about 75 short tons of supplies have moved through this pass daily from December through the first week of April 1966. Prior to this year the main route southward from the pass area extended along Route 23 to the Sépone (Tchepone) area, thence eastward along Route 9 to its junction with Route 92, and finally southward along Route 92 to the area of Ban Bac. A proliferation of tracks and trails led eastward from Route 92 into the highlands of South Vietnam.

New Communist road construction during 1965-66 has extended the network and also provided alternate routes and bypasses. Route 911 now branches from Route 23 about 25 miles south of Mu Gia Pass, providing an alternate and more direct route to the area west of Sépone. A new road completed 23 March except for a half-mile stretch now connects Route 911 directly with Route 92, bypassing the east-west segment of Route 9. Route 96 extends south from Route 92 to the vicinity of the Cambodian border in the south. Lateral east-west Routes 922, 165, and 16 extend eastward toward the South Vietnam border from this north-south overall trunk route. Route 110, a new road that extends from Cambodia into Laos, connects with the southern end of Route 96.

An alternative to the Mu Gia Pass entry point, which was bombed by B-52's on 12 April, will be provided by Route 24 between North Vietnamese Route 101 and Laotian Route 911. Part of Route 24 is still under construction. The amount of work required in the continued camouflage trellising of this road (see FIGURE 2) indicates that the Communists probably hope to use it through the summer rainy season. The precise alignment of the road will become extremely difficult to detect from the air as rapidly growing vegetation covers the trellis during the rainy season. From the point of view of climate the new road has some marginal advantage over the Mu Gia route in that supplies can be moved overland farther south along the coast, which is relatively dry, while the Mu Gia area is receiving the heavy rains of the summer southwest monsoon (see precipitation graphs on map for comparison of rainfall regimes). Supplies might also be moved by coastal boat to the North Vietnam port of Quang Khe and forwarded into Laos over the new route, which would greatly reduce overland distance. The major bypasses elsewhere along the roadnet are those that circumvent the original chokepoint (established by aerial bombing) on Route 12 in Laos, somewhat south of the Mu Gia Pass (see inset on map).

Most of the roads are probably single-lane, all-season roads with partially improved surfaces that deteriorate to some extent during the rainy season (see FIGURE 3). During the last rainy season, June-September 1965, Communist vehicular traffic generally stopped in the Mu Gia Pass area, and supplies were moved southward along Route 23 by porters. Trucks were used to some extent, however, on Route 9 and parts of Routes 92 and 922 during the last rainy season.

Photographic analysis indicates that the truck route from 911 south to the Cambodian border may be an all-weather route to the South Vietnam border that can be used by the Communists during the coming rainy season. The alignment generally follows higher ground that probably will not be flooded. Reportedly, some sections of this route are constructed with rock aggregate or corduroy. After the onset of the impending monsoon season, however, some of the route may revert to stretches of only fair-weather road, in spite of the improvements. Most of the route is aligned through an area that has very heavy rainfall; the area of component Routes 92 and 922 receives an annual rainfall of 120 to 140 inches. By comparison, the Route 23 area probably receives 100 inches of rainfall annually, and during the 1965 summer rainy season this route was impassable to vehicular traffic.

* This report was prepared in the Office of Basic Intelligence. The alignment of the Communist roadnet on the map is based on an NPIC briefing board dated April 1966.

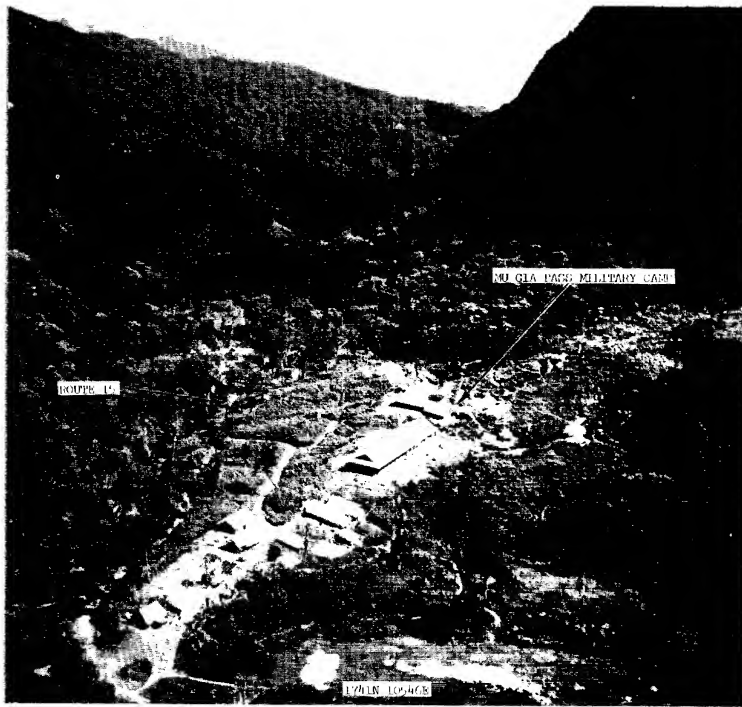
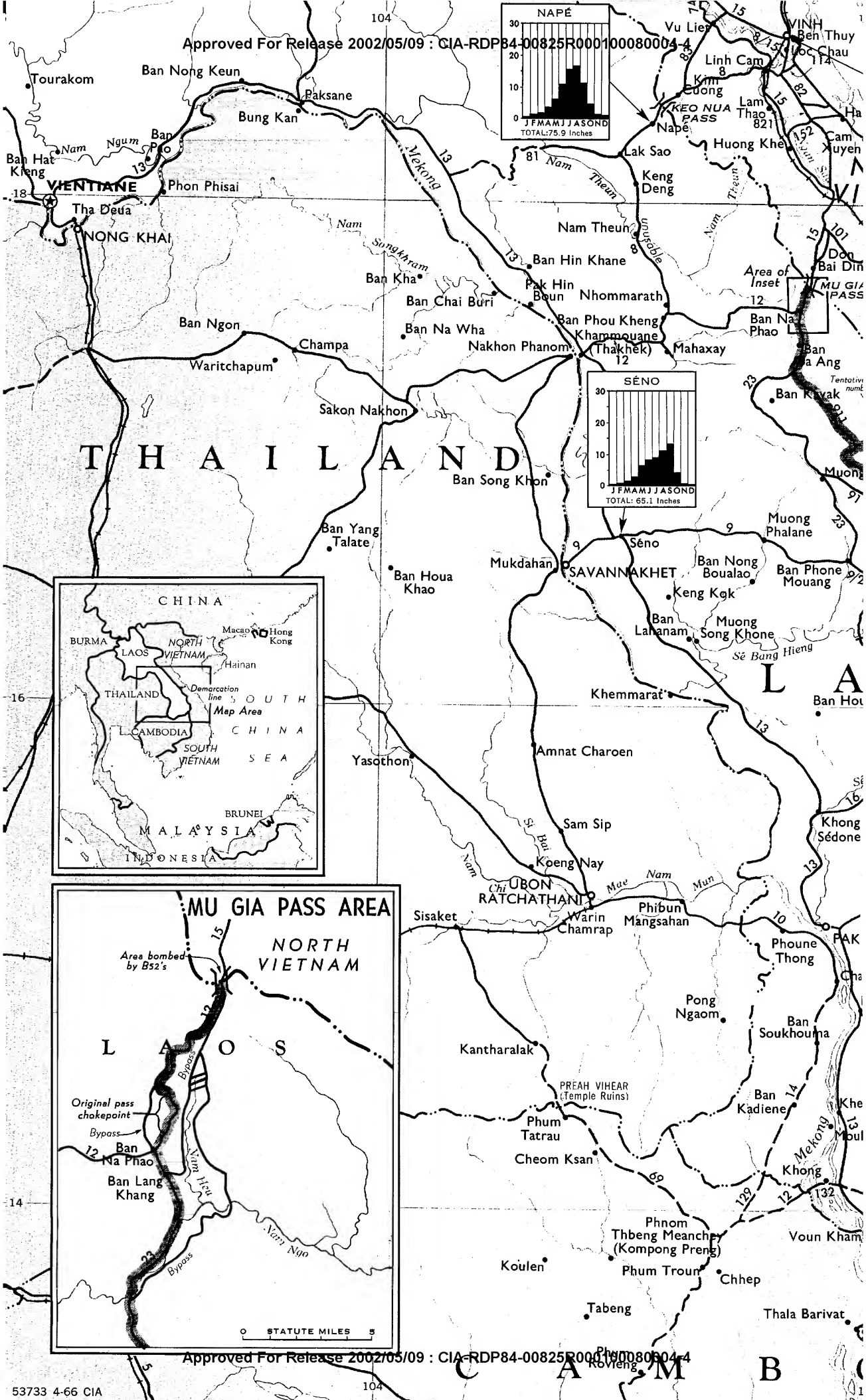


FIGURE 1. MU GIA PASS, NORTH VIETNAM, THROUGH WHICH ROUTE 15 ENTERS LAOS. A segment of Route 15 can be seen in left middleground. The target of B-52 bombing was the gap area shown in background. The military camp buildings in foreground have been severely damaged or destroyed since this photograph was taken in 1964.

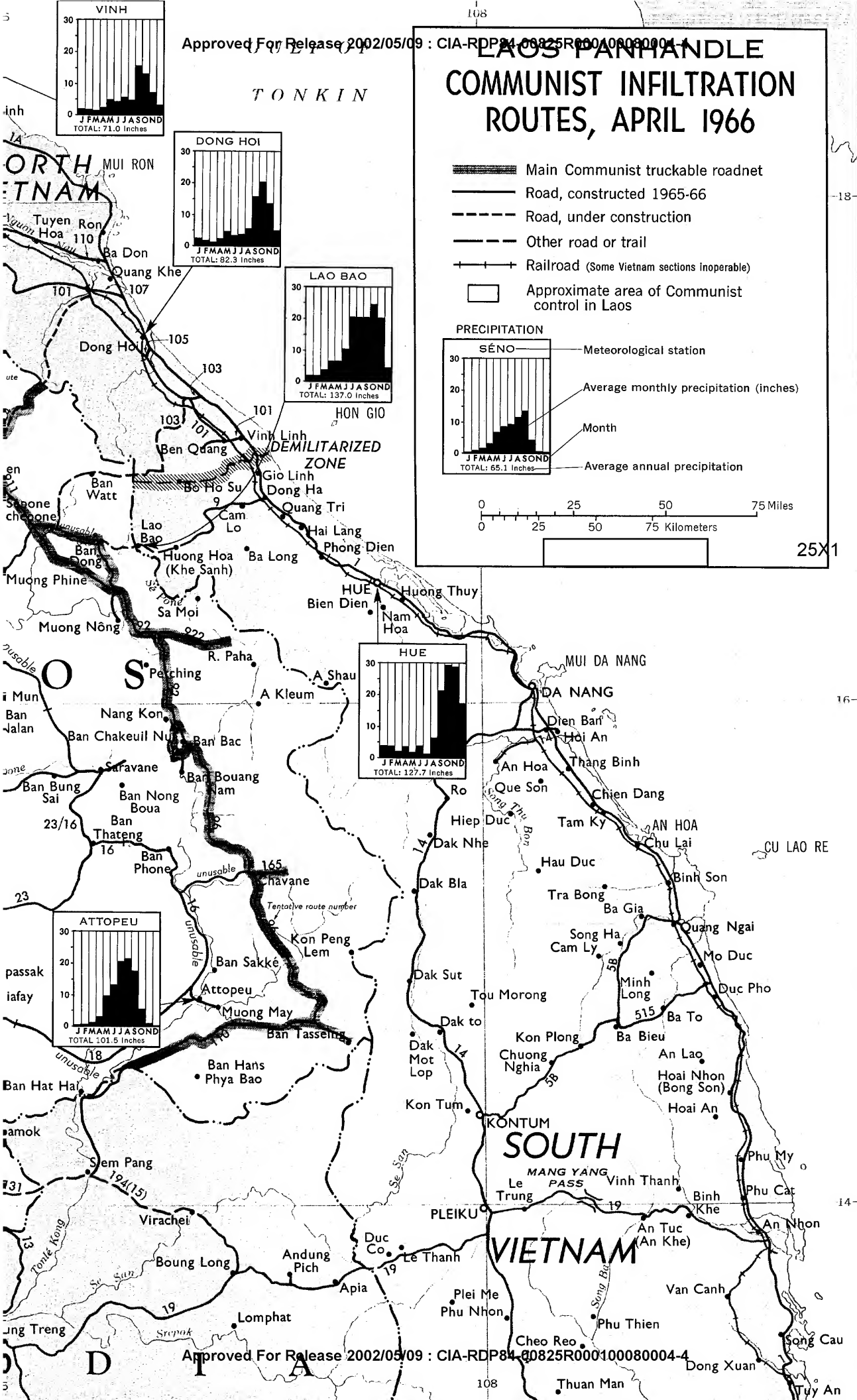
FIGURE 2. PARTIALLY COMPLETED VINE-COVERED BAMBOO TRELLIS CAMOUFLAGE ON ROUTE 911, 21 MILES NORTHWEST OF SÉ-PONE (PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN OCTOBER 1965). A similar trellis is being built over much of the new road, Route 24, that will connect North Vietnam Route 101 and Laos Route 911. During the impending rainy season, fast-growing vines will completely cover these trellises and make detection of the road alignment almost impossible.



FIGURE 3. CLOSEUP OF UNIMPROVED DIRT ROAD, PART OF ROUTE 911 ABOUT 16 MILES SOUTHEAST OF JUNCTION OF ROUTES 911 AND 23. The road surface will probably become a mire during the summer rainy season, and logs will probably be used for corduroying in an effort to keep the road open to trucks. Rock aggregate may be used on some stretches.



LAOS PANHANDLE COMMUNIST INFILTRATION ROUTES, APRIL 1966



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